

## December 16, 1999: Move Food Aid to the Hungry in Southern Sudan

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Lawrence J. Goodrich, Communications Director, (202) 523-3240

The U. S. Commission on International Religious Freedom today decried the Sudanese government's use of food aid as a weapon of war and called on the U.S. government to take a series of actions to ensure food aid reaches all hungry people in Sudan's war-torn southern region. Civil war has raged in Sudan for more than 16 years between an Islamist regime in Khartoum and mostly Christian and animist rebels in the south, at a cost of about 2 million lives. A major cause of the war has been repeated attempts by the central government to impose Islamic law on the south. Food aid has been organized under the United Nations World Food Programme's "Operation Lifeline Sudan," but that aid has been subject to repeated Sudanese government bans on flights to distressed regions when they are under rebel control, effectively cutting off aid. Such flight bans are currently in effect. "This is clearly a war with a religious-persecution dimension," said Rabbi David Saperstein, the Commission's chairman. "The Sudanese government is deliberately starving people for religious, as well as political, military, and ethnic reasons." In order to ensure that hungry people of all religious and ethnic backgrounds get food, the Commission recommended that: The U.S. government should work with the international community to pressure the Sudanese government to immediately stop banning food flights, which is an undeniable use of food as a military and political weapon and has caused hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians to starve. In addition to its participation in Operation Lifeline Sudan, the U.S. government should continue its policy of shipping food into southern Sudan outside the program and increase the percentage of food thus delivered. The U.S. government should undertake an active diplomatic campaign to encourage other nations and humanitarian organizations to move food aid directly into Sudan outside Operation Lifeline Sudan, regardless of Sudanese government strictures but consistent with international law. "We strongly condemn the Sudanese government's ongoing policy of politicizing food aid in the south, affecting thousands of innocent civilians," Chairman Saperstein said. "What's important is that religious persecution stop and that hungry people get the food they need."

Rabbi David Saperstein, Chair

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